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SUBJECT: CHILD LABOR IN BRAZIL - ADDITIONAL COMMENT ON DOL
LIST OF GOODS FOR TVPRA

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[¶1.](#) (SBU) Summary. Child labor specialist Renato Mendes (strictly protect) at the ILO Brazil office said child labor continues to be a problem in the footwear and pineapple industries, has largely been eliminated from sisal and cotton, and the situation in the rice industry is unclear. A significant obstacle to the elimination of child labor in the footwear industry is the recent shift from factory production to outsourced production in private homes, which prevents government inspection. Local programs under the International Program to Eliminate Child Labor (IPEC) have made significant achievements in Brazil. End summary.

[¶2.](#) (SBU) In a meeting with poloff on June 17, Renato Mendes, child labor specialist at the ILO Brazil office, discussed some products that will be included in the forthcoming Department of Labor List of Goods associated with child and forced labor (ref A). The following paragraphs summarize his views on child labor in specific industries.

Footwear

[¶3.](#) (SBU) The footwear industry, Mendes explained, had at one point in recent years become largely free of child labor, but a significant shift in the industry allowed the practice to reappear in such a form that it is now difficult to control through direct intervention (inspections). A large percentage of Brazilian footwear is now produced through subcontracting that may involve several intermediate levels between the producer and the wholesaler. At the end of this chain, one often finds a small-scale home production that involves child labor. Under Brazilian law, the home is inviolable, and labor inspectors may not enter, resulting in misleading official data about the involvement of children in the footwear industry.

Pineapples

[¶4.](#) (SBU) Important progress has been made toward eliminating child labor from the pineapple industry in Brazil, but one cannot say it has been eliminated, Mendes said. In 2006, pineapple growers in 40 towns in Paraiba, the top pineapple-producing state, signed an agreement that was coordinated by ILO Brazil, under the auspices of the International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC), with funding from the U.S. Department of Labor. (Note. Mendes is responsible for IPEC in Brazil. End note.)

As a result, child labor has been greatly reduced in the industry, but not yet eliminated. Mendes noted that an ongoing problem that inspectors face in the industry is that while they may enter a farm without notice to conduct an inspection, they may not enter a private, family-run lot. Some pineapple producers in Paraiba have avoided inspections by subdividing their property into parcels farmed by families, which government inspectors may not enter.

Sisal

¶ 5. (SBU) Brazil's chief sisal producing region is in Bahia, where a large-scale program to eliminate child labor has been very successful, according to Mendes. The program was the first IPEC program in Brazil, and ensures full-time school attendance for at-risk children. The conditions have now been established that are needed for the complete elimination of child labor from the sisal growing region. He noted that the region is extensive, and some isolated cases of child labor could still exist. He also cautioned that because the total sisal crop is small, the data sample is also small, and as a result the margin of error in the data is great and therefore the PNAD (Pesquisa de Amostra por Domicilio) data specifically on sisal are not reliable, unlike data for large crops such as tobacco and sugar cane.

Cotton

¶ 6. (SBU) The case of cotton is less clear than other products. Mendes noted that cotton production in the largest cotton-growing state, Mato Grosso, is now thoroughly mechanized. During the meeting with poloff, he phoned a

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senior Mato Grosso state government labor official, who told Mendes there has not been a case of child labor in cotton in Mato Grosso in several years. He suggested that PNAD data may provide additional insight into possible child labor in cotton production.

Rice

¶ 7. (SBU) Mendes noted that it is not clear to him whether child labor exists in commercial rice production in Brazil. He said the largest Brazilian producers are mechanized. (Note: According to 2009 Brazilian Agriculture Ministry statistics, 70 percent of the rice crop is produced in the southern states of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina, 20 percent in the north and northeast region, and 10 percent in the center-west region. Most of Brazil's rice exports come from the south. End note.)

Soy and Castor Beans should be monitored

¶ 8. (SBU) Soy beans and castor beans -- not now associated with child labor -- should be monitored because some conditions exist that could favor the appearance of child labor in their cultivation, according to Mendes. The Government of Brazil, in connection with its promotion of biofuels, has established a goal that 30 percent of the total crop yield of soy beans and castor beans should be produced by family farms. Family-produced soy and castor beans can be expected to go entirely toward the production of biofuels, Mendes said. A government financing body, the BNDES (National Bank for Social and Economic Development), through PRONAF (National Program to Strengthen Family Farming), which is jointly administered by the Ministry for Agricultural Development and the Ministry for Social Development, offers some safeguard against child labor because a lending condition prohibits the use of child or forced labor. But this may not be sufficient to keep child labor out of family production of soy and castor beans, and Mendes suggested that another important indicator to watch is the absence or presence of full-time schooling for at-risk children.

Comment

¶9. (SBU) While child labor is increasingly an urban phenomenon in Brazil, as Mendes pointed out (ref E), there appears to be a positive correlation between child labor and less developed, non-mechanized forms of agriculture and simple manufacturing, which in Brazil situates much child labor in the northeast. This is evident with pineapples, sugar cane, manioc, ceramics, bricks, and tiles. As Mendes also pointed out, child labor can also be expected at the frontier, where new areas are being opened to exploitation, such as with cattle ranching. The exceptions are footwear and tobacco, where child labor is found in the more developed south. The northeast and the north have the highest percentages of families receiving benefits from government social programs such as Bolsa Familia (Family Stipend). Bolsa Familia alone may be insufficient to reduce child labor, while a series of factors such as full-time school attendance, inspections, labor-management-government agreements, corporate social responsibility actions, and others, can create the necessary conditions to eliminate child labor even in an impoverished area with less developed forms of agriculture. Finally, the government's promotion of family farming could inadvertently cause an increase in child labor if the factors that help to prevent it are absent.

SOBEL